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UNCLAS WELLINGTON 000135

SIPDIS

HONG KONG FOR IRS/CID

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: OTRA ECON ASEC HK NZ IRS

SUBJECT: COUNTRY CLEARANCE TO THE COOK ISLANDS FOR IRS

OFFICIALS, FEBRUARY 24 - MARCH 12, 2005

REF: HONG KONG 721

¶11. Embassy grants country clearance to IRS Officials Jay Van Kirk, Reginald Brown, Monte J. Myers, and Tonya Martin to travel to The Cook Islands, February 24 - March 12, 2005. The purpose of travel is to provide a 2-week Financial Investigative Techniques (FIT) class to Cook Island Law Enforcement Personnel.

¶12. Embassy understands no assistance is required.

¶13. Point of contact at Embassy Wellington is Pol/Econ Counselor Kathy Hadda. Contact details are as follows:

Office: 644-462-6063

Fax: 644-472-3537

Cell: 027-451-2539

E-mail: HaddaKB2@state.gov

Security Assessment

¶14. The Cook Islands is a Parliamentary democracy in free association with New Zealand, on which they rely for defense and assistance in meeting low-level security threats. The Embassy is not aware of any specific threats to U.S. facilities or personnel at this time in the Cook Islands. However, in light of the worldwide security alert all visitors should heighten their security awareness and report any unusual incidents to the Regional Security Office at the Embassy in Wellington, New Zealand.

¶15. Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the U.S. and the November 2002 terrorist bombing in Bali, there has been concern that terrorists might seek to take advantage of the low level of security maintained in small island states such as the Cook Islands in order to target tourists in previously safe destinations. New Zealand has worked with the Cook Islands to improve airport security in response to this possibility. Terrorist actions may include, but are not limited to, suicide operations, bombings, or kidnapping. Possible threats include conventional weapons such as explosive devices or non-conventional weapons, including chemical or biological agents. Terrorists do not distinguish between official and civilian targets. Targets may include facilities where Americans and other foreigners congregate or visit, such as residential areas, clubs, restaurants, places of worship, schools, hotels, outdoor recreation events, resorts, and beaches. U.S. citizens should increase their security awareness at such locations, avoid them, or switch to other locations where Americans in large numbers generally do not congregate.

¶16. The Cook Islands offshore finance industry has come under scrutiny regarding possible money laundering. The Cook Islands has been included on the OECD's list of non-cooperating states in the fight against money laundering.

¶17. As a result of recent military action in Iraq, there is a potential for retaliatory actions to be taken against U.S. citizens and interest throughout the world. Public demonstrations carry the potential for precipitating violence directed at American citizens.

¶18. U.S. Government facilities worldwide remain at a heightened state of alert and some have drawn down their dependents and/or personnel. These facilities may temporarily close or suspend public services from time to time for security reasons. In those instances, U.S. embassies and consulates will make every effort to provide emergency services to American citizens. Monitor the local news and maintain contact with the nearest American Embassy or U.S. Consulate.

¶19. Crime: Appropriate common sense precautions should be taken, especially at night, to avoid becoming a target of opportunity.

¶10. Weather: Severe cyclones present a threat during the hurricane season, which is from November to March.

Swindells